8 / The Quest for the Meaning of History

THE LIMITLESS QUESTION about the meaning of history in general is quite different from the more limited question about the sense of specific events. Both of these problems are distinct from the investigation of those events whose occurrence poses no problem, because they take place naturally, independent of the will of man whose activity brings about the suffering of history. All natural events, such as the history of the earth and the universe, are not historical in the human sense of history. These events occur beyond good and evil and beyond sense and nonsense. We can inquire into the meaning of historical revolutions because we interpret their significance, but we cannot inquire into the sense of re-volution, taken literally, i.e., as the orderly rotation of the heavenly bodies. The rise and fall of civilizations does not take place like the rising and setting of the sun. Thus, we look upon natural catastrophes differently than we do historical catastrophes, although the destruction of a city by an earthquake is no different in its final effects from technically planned destruction by bombs.

When we discuss the meaning of history in its totality, which we glibly call world-history [*Welt-geschichte*], we consider our human world and lightly ignore the rest of the world. Further, this sort of discussion also implies that there is meaning in history in the sense of a purpose or goal toward which the larger historical movements are aiming. If the history of humanity were, in the final analysis, an aimless movement which had no purpose, then —according to the sense of "meaning" assumed in such an inquiry —it would be meaningless. The term "meaninglessness," however, like the term "Godlessness," is ambiguous. It can mean that history has no meaning; more positively, it can also mean that

we have extricated ourselves from the question about meaning, that we are free of it because we do not believe that history can give a meaning to human existence which it would not have even outside of history or which it would lack without history.

It is hardly accidental that in everyday usage we do not distinguish "sense" from "purpose" and that we interchange "sense" and "aim." Usually, the purpose, the "wherefore," determines the interpretation we put on something's "meaning" or "sense." The meaning of all contingent things which are not what they are by nature, but are willed and created by God or man, is determined by their purpose. A table is what it is because, as a dining table or desk, there is a purpose for which it was made. Even historical events point toward a purpose beyond themselves in that the action which brings them about has an end which determines their sense and meaning. Because history is a temporal movement, the purpose which is its aim must be in the future. Particular events or a series of events, although they are important for man, are not yet meaningful and purposeful as such. The fullness of meaning is a matter of fulfillment that lies in the future. Any pronouncement about the final meaning of historical events is only possible if their future *telos* has been made known. When a historical movement has disclosed its direction and scope, then we reflect on its first appearance in order to determine the meaning of the entire event on the basis of its ending.[1] (Here, "entire" is used in the sense of having a definite beginning and a definite ending.) Therefore, the assumption that history in general has an ultimate meaning anticipates some ultimate purpose as its final aim. The temporal dimension of a *telos* is an eschatological future. But the future is there for us only because we can anticipate something which is not yet present. We "know" the future only through belief and expectation.

Hegel claimed in his philosophy of history that, by and large, one could not only await, hope for, and believe in a final aim of history, but also that this aim could be known, that it could be

1. See Schiller's Jena acceptance speech, *What Is Universal-History and Why Do We Study It?* "The actual sequence of events leads down from the origin of things to their present organization; the universal historian pushes up from the present world-situation toward the origin of things. When he makes an intellectual ascent from the current year or century to the recent past and notices events among events in the recent past which hold the key to the next adjacent period—when he has followed this path, step by step to the beginning of our recorded memory, then he can turn around and retrace his footsteps, using as a guide those events which he has already described and he can descend easily and unencumbered from the very beginning to the present age. This is the world history which we have and which will be presented to you."

grasped philosophically. This is also the thesis of historical materialism. In fact, for Marx, the science of history is the "only" true science because it encompasses everything of human concern, has a definite end and therefore a meaning—the future "kingdom of freedom" whose realization requires a classless society. And even Heidegger's construction of the entire history of metaphysics from Anaximander to Nietzsche in terms of the history of Being [*Seinsgeschichte*], which is nothing less than the entire history of Western thought, is inconceivable without Hegel's philosophy of world-history and history of philosophy. However, for Heidegger, the question about the meaning of history becomes pointless, since rapidly changing human destinies which man, historically, must take upon himself take the place of an ultimate historical purpose.[2]

In the introduction to his lectures on the philosophy of world-history, Hegel sharply distinguished philosophical world-history from "naive" or "factual" history which reports simply and unreflectively what happened in the past. The point behind the distinction was to make history philosophically and rationally understandable as a purposeful and meaningful progressive movement and to justify it for common sense, which sees in history only aimless meandering or else a monotonous repetition of the same old story. Hegel singles out as representatives of factual history the Greek and Roman historians, i.e., those who, unlike Hegel, did not think in terms of a Christian theology of history and its belief in a divine providence, but possessed instead an unbiased view of the changing struggle for power. There are numerous examples of factual history: Herodotus' account of the Persian wars; Thucydides' commentary on the Peloponnesian war; Polybius' recording of Rome's rise to world-dominion; Caesar's description of the Gallic wars; the *Storie Fiorentine* by Machiavelli; *Histoire de mon temps* by Frederick II; and, in our own century, Churchill's *Memoirs*. These histories constructed a unity out of events in past political history and preserved them for the memory of future generations without going into the problem of historical meaning and purpose. The unity which they present is concerned with a sharply limited area of experience. As a result of this limitation, their reports are clear, concrete, and instructive because they record only what they as explorers, statesmen, and generals have seen with their own eyes, actually experienced or made a

2. Heidegger's characteristic play on the word "history" [*Geschichte*] in the meanings of *Geschick*, *Schickung*, and *Schicksal* cannot be reproduced in other European languages. *Storia*, *histoire*, and history have nothing in common with *destino*, *destin*, and destiny. See *M. Heidegger, Denker in dürftiger Zeit*, by Karl Löwith (1960, pp. 44ff.).

part of their experience. However, to quote Hegel, what the experience of history teaches is "that nations and governments never learn anything from history and have never acted according to lessons which could have been drawn from it." [3] But this is exactly what is instructive in factual, straightforward history in contrast to the philosophy of history.

> If one wants to study what is essential in history—the spirit of nations—or when one wants to live and to have lived in and with them, then one must become engrossed in these factual historians and pass some time with them. In fact, one cannot spend too much time with them. Here, one has the first-hand history of a people or a regime that is fresh and full of life.[4]

Hegel adds that one could almost rest content with such authors if he had no express desire to become a scholarly historian—not to mention a philosopher of history.

But why was Hegel not content to rest with the factual standpoint and remain within its point of view? Why did he not only go further but so far beyond them? Hegel was not able to find in this factual history the "eye of reason," which discloses the course and development of world-history as a "rational progress in the consciousness of freedom," by whose means all the evil of world-history—"that slaughtering block upon which the happiness of peoples and individuals is sacrificed"—is finally redeemed. The pragmatic reflection of the ordinary historical approach, of course, cannot see in history any such redeeming purpose. Although it is generally acknowledged that laws, and therefore reason, rule in the natural world, no one has yet attempted to point out the precise place of reason in the development of the spiritual world of history and to prove that there is an inner necessity and lawfulness behind what is apparently accidental and chaotic. This reason in history is brought about by those individuals in world-history who know what they want and act accordingly. "The philosophical approach has no other purpose than to eliminate the accidental," [5] and to recognize in the historically important phenomena of *change* the *development* towards increasingly richer and higher stages of spirit [*Geist*] and its freedom.[6] For Hegel, the *logos* of the universe is a "world-spirit" which does not reveal itself in its higher stages in nature but in the historical world of man, because only man is a reflective and active spirit. This absolute

3. *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte.*
4. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 150ff.

world-spirit which first realizes itself in man is at the same time a *will* and, therefore, a spirit of freedom.

> We must confront history with the confidence and conviction that the world of *will* cannot be handed over to the accidental. We must assume that a final purpose rules the happenings in nations, that reason prevails in world-history—not the reason of some particular Subject, but a divine, absolute reason. The proof of this truth is our treatment of world-history itself.[7]

We cannot discuss here to what extent Hegel's philosophy of world-history, with its progressive direction toward a meaning which realizes its final purpose, is influenced by the *procursus* toward the kingdom of God in the Christian theology of history, which it secularized.[8] It must suffice to point out that Christianity completely transformed the meaning of history, but this raises the question as to why the Greek philosophers left history to the historians and never made it a subject of philosophical knowledge. Even Aristotle—the teacher and friend of Alexander the Great, who had conquered the Far East and founded an empire—did not devote a single work to history, even though he examined almost everything else: heaven and earth, plants and animals, politics and ethics, rhetoric and poetry. It would be absurd to believe that Aristotle could have seen in Alexander what Hegel saw in Napoleon—a personification of the "world-spirit"—for this would presuppose that the *logos* of the eternal cosmos could enter into the transitory *pragmata* of the history of mortal man. But despite this lack of reflection upon world-history, we cannot assume that the Greeks still did not know what history was and had not yet experienced it "authentically." The Greek historians investigated and reported histories which revolved about important political events, but the Fathers of the Church developed a theology of history from Judaic prophecies and Christian eschatology which extended from the Creation to the Last Judgment and Salvation. Modern post-Christian man invented a philosophy of history which secularized the theological principle of salvation into a promise of worldly fulfillment. When we consider that Deutero-Isaiah and Herodotus were almost contemporaries, we can gauge the distance between Greek wisdom and biblical faith. The "discovery" of the historical world and a historical existence whose meaning lies in the future is not the result of a philosophical insight but the prod-

7. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

8. On this question see, by the same author, *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen* (1953) [English translation: *Meaning in History*]. Also, E. Gilson, *Metamorphosen des Gottesreiches* (1960).

uct of a confident expectation which originally looked forward to the coming of the kindom of God and only later to a future of man.[9] Certainly, the Christian confidence in a future fulfillment has been lost for the modern historical consciousness, but the focus on the future as such is still predominant. This perspective permeates post-Christian European thought and is the cause of all our anxiety about the purpose and destiny of history. Not only the radically secular philosophies of progress of Condorçet, Saint-Simon, Comte, and Marx are oriented eschatologically toward the future; so are their more recent transformations which appear as negativistic theories of progressive decay. The fatalistic view of progress which is dominant today strikes a balance between these extremes.

F. Schlegel summed up the origin of our historical thought and action in the following way: "The revolutionary desire to realize the kingdom of God is the elastic point of departure for our whole progressive culture and the beginning of modern history." The desire is revolutionary because it reverses the original and natural sense of the *re-volutiones,* and all post-Christian culture is progressive because it continually secularizes the theology of history—from the Augustinian *procursus* towards the kingdom of God ("the pilgrim's progress"), to the Hegelian "progress in the consciousness of freedom" and the Marxian expectation of an earthly kingdom of freedom. But whoever regards all historical events *a priori* from the perspective of the future and of progress directed towards that future, or even as a progressive decay, must look upon all that has happened thus far as preliminary stages in a pre-history whose purpose has not yet been realized. Just as the Old Testament was a *praeparatio evangelica* for the Fathers of the Church and a promise for the future which was only fulfilled by the New Testament, so, in general, the interpretation of the past is now made into a retroactive prophecy. Thus, the past is understood as a meaningful preparation for the future even by the ordinary historian, whose job it is to determine what happened. The modern historian asks, as Tocqueville did, in his introduction to *La Démocratie en Amérique,* "Ou allons-nous donc?" while the classical historian asked how it all came about. Greek history was not oriented toward the future. When it did have occasion to consider the future, it did not do so in the opinion that everything which had happened so far would first realize its meaning in the future, but from the completely different conviction

9. See, by the same author, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur Kritik der geschichtlichen Existenz* (1960).

that even future events would submit to the same laws as past events. For the Greeks, human nature does not change fundamentally and it is "the nature of all things to mature and pass away," as Thucydides said. Polybius, who witnessed the collapse of Macedonian hegemony and the rise of Rome to world-dominion, thought it fitting to recall the prophetic words of Demetrius who, in his essay *On Fate*, had foretold what was actually to happen one hundred and fifty years after Alexander's conquest of the Persian empire:

> For if you do not keep in mind a countless number of years or many generations but merely the last fifty years or so, you will see in them the cruelty of fate. I ask you if you consider it possible that fifty years ago . . . if a god had prophesied the future, whether the Persians . . . or the Macedonians . . . would ever have believed that during our lifetime the very name of the Persians would be completely wiped out—they who ruled over almost the whole world—and that the Macedonians, whose name was almost unknown, would now be masters? But this fate, which never comes to terms with life, which always upsets our calculations with fresh blows and proves its power in destroying our hopes—this same fate now makes it known to all men that, in furnishing the Macedonians with all the wealth of the Persians, it has only granted them these blessings until it decides to distribute them otherwise.
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> (Polybius, *History* XXIX, 21)

In the same way, Polybius himself, as a Greek emigrant and a friend of the Roman Scipio, recorded the latter's remarks after the destruction of Carthage. Scipio observed that the same fate which the power of the Romans had just visited upon their enemy would someday befall Rome, just as it had formerly befallen Troy. Polybius adds that it would be difficult to find a remark that was more statesmanlike and more profound. It is worthy of a great man that in the moment of his greatest triumph he reflects on the possible reversal of fate.

How can we fail to see that this supra-historical wisdom is superior to the illusions of the modern historical consciousness? We can hardly conceive of a modern statesman who, after the victorious outcome of the last world war, would reflect, as did Scipio after the destruction of Carthage, that the same fate which has just been meted out to Berlin will someday befall Washington and Moscow. The modern historical consciousness, whether it is based on Hegel, Marx, or Comte, does not know how to unite the remote future with the remote past because it does not want to admit that all things on earth come and go. In this respect however, Greek and Christian thought were completely in agreement

and equally far removed from the modern belief in progress. It was as evident for Augustine as for Polybius that political empires are as mortal as individual men, though they may endure somewhat longer. But we need not limit ourselves to Greek and Christian examples alone. In Japan, it has always been customary and proper for leading statesmen and generals to withdraw into Buddhist monasteries after a war—not out of any subsequent surrender to history, but because of a mature insight into the frailty of all things human. Tacitus says the same thing as Polybius: "The more I reflect upon the events of past and present, the the more the illusion and unreliability of all things human are manifested in deliberations and occurrences" (*ludibria rerum mortalium cunctis in negotiis*). It would be foolish to suppose that this complete absence of a belief in the meaning of history makes factual history superficial because it does not discover the hidden design of a divine Providence.

The difference between the classical and the modern historical consciousness can even be shown through language. The Greeks and the Romans had no specific word for what we in the singular call *the* history; they knew about histories (*historiae*) only in the plural. In German, we distinguish between "*Geschichte*" and "*Historie.*" The word "*Geschichte*" has the sense of "occurrence" [*Geschehen*], while "*Historie,*" in contrast, is a foreign word from the Greek which refers to the investigation and reporting of investigated events. In regard to this distinction, Hegel stressed the essential continuity of *res gestae* and *historia rerum gestarum,* because actual *historical* acts and events are simultaneous with historical *consciousness* and historical *accounts.*[10] Nations which live without a historical consciousness have no real history, although many things may happen to them. For this reason too, the principle of Hegel's own interpretation of world-history with its theme of progress towards freedom, i.e., "being-with-oneself in otherness" [*Beisichsein im Anderssein*], is essentially a progress in the "consciousness" of freedom. Freedom can only transform its activity into an actual world of freedom if it is fully conscious of itself. The constitutive connection between historical consciousness and historical events, which Hegel raises to the level of a principle, was just as unknown to the Greeks as all ontology of consciousness. The latter originates with the Christian experience of the self and results in a devaluation of nature which does not know itself, in contrast to a "spirit" or "mind" [*Geist*] which does. History, in Greek, is a verbal concept and simply means investi-

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 164ff.

gating, knowing, being informed, and reporting; it does not refer to any particular and special area of investigation which separates the history of mind from nature and a historical "world" from the natural world. The classical historians record histories but they have no conception of a meaningful progressive world-history. They investigate and record *pragmata,* i.e., events which come about through the political actions of men and not simply through nature. History, in and of itself, can refer to anything that can be investigated and therefore includes natural events too, as in the "natural history" (*historia naturalis*) of Pliny.

The Greeks were deeply impressed by the eternal order and beauty of the visible world, but no Greek thinker would ever think of connecting this well-ordered eternal cosmos with the transitory *pragmata* of human histories in a "world-history." Herodotus, Thucydides, and Polybius investigated and recorded the great events and deeds of their time. But neither the war of the Greeks against the Persians, Athens against Sparta, nor the rise of Rome to a world empire inspired contemporary philosophers to construct a philosophy of history. The reason for the absence of philosophy of history is not apathy toward great events, but the clear recognition that while there can be reports or "histories" of changes which are unique and occur only once, there can be no reliable knowledge. The classical philosophers did not consider history thematically and did not reflect about the meaning of world-history, because as philosophers the object of their inquiry was the unity and totality of natural being and of that which always is. They left in the hands of the political historians the changing historical fates which might always have been other than they are.[11]

Taken literally, "world-history" is a misnomer, for only the natural world is really the all-inclusive or universal "world." Our historical human world is something transitory within the natural world and can disappear like Icarus in Breughel's painting, whose leg alone is still visible as he plunges from heaven into the sea. On the horizon the sun is shining, while on shore a fisherman squats and on the hill a shepherd tends his flock and a farmer ploughs his field as if between heaven and earth, nothing at all

11. See also P. Valéry, *Discours de l'histoire* (1932): "Observez ceci sur vous-mêmes: Toutes les fois que l'histoire vous saisit, que vous pensez historiquement, que vous vous laissez séduire à revivre l'aventure humaine de quelque époque révolue, l'intérêt que vous y prenez est tout soutenu du sentiment que les choses eussent pu être tout autres, tourner tout autrement. A chaque instant, vous supposez un autre *instant suivant* que celui suivet: à chaque présent imaginaire où vous vous placez, vous concevez un autre avenir que celui qui s'est réalisé."

has happened. World-*history* does not stand and fall with man, for the world itself can exist without us; it is supra-human and absolutely self-sufficient. However, since the beginning of the modern age, this unitary and total world has been split into two different worlds: a physical world-project, the world of modern science; and a historical human world, the world of the humanities. The world of nature was philosophically grounded anew by Descartes in the seventeenth century, and the world of history (*il mondo civile*) a century later by his opponent, Vico. At the end of this split between nature and history, there stands the assertion of Hegel's pupil, Marx, that "history is the true natural history of man," that is, that the world which is natural to man is not the world of nature but the world of history because man produces the latter by means of his own labor.[12] Similarly, in the context of the bourgeois philosophy of the nineteenth century, Dilthey remarked, "We do not carry over any meaning from the world (of nature) into the life (of man). We are open to the possibility that sense and meaning originate first with man and his history." [13] The question, then, is this: Who is Dilthey's "we"? Clearly, it is modern post-Christian man who believes that he can find his own meaning in the world of history while he ignores the world of nature, the only truly independent world, and thereby forgets that historically existing man is only in the world because the world of nature produced him.

Nature, for Marx, as for Hegel, is only a subordinate precondition of the historical activity of man, e.g., in producing geographical and climatic circumstances which condition human activity. According to a sarcastic comment of Marx, a superiority of nature over the history of man exists only "on some Australian coral islands of recent origin." What Marx finds interesting in, for example, an apple, is not that there are trees in nature which bear fruit, but that this apparently natural product was imported into Europe during a certain period due to certain economic and social conditions and was traded as merchandise for money. From this radically historical point of view, it is unimportant that man, who in cultivating nature is historically productive, is also a creature of nature and not a self-made *homunculus*. The principle of such historical standpoints is that the self-production of the historical world by means of human labor changes the world of nature. The only fundamental insight which Marx was consciously aware of having taken from *The Phenomenology of Mind* is that

12. See Marx, *Capital*, I, pp. 4, 13.
13. *Collected Works*, VII (1921).

man creates his own world and hence his own self by the activity of work which transforms everything. *Physis,* which at the beginning of Western thought was the "all" and originally the self-sufficient essence of all being, both *natura rerum* and *natura deorum,* is almost nonexistent for historical thought, while history, whose stories the classical philosophers left to the political historians, has, so it seems, become everything. Marx liked to quote Hegel's remark that the most criminal thought is more magnificent and sublime than all the wonders of the starry skies because the criminal, as mind, is conscious of his thoughts whereas nature does not know itself. Marx is no longer astonished by those things which are by nature what they are and cannot be otherwise. Instead, he is indignant because things are not different in the historical world. He therefore wants to "change" the world, a demand which can only be met if, and to whatever degree, the "world" is a world for man.

Thus, the "material" dimension of historical materialism is not nature but the appropriation of nature by man. Whenever Marx refers to the "material" conditions of life, he denies Hegel's starting point—the experiences of "consciousness"—and asserts that these conditions are the historical conditions of work and production. The simple and fundamental meaning of "historical materialism" can be found in this return to a mode of life understood "materialistically" as the historically determined conditions of work and production. Its critical peak was reached through Marx's conflict with the German idealism according to which the real history of humanity is a history of the "idea," the "spirit," and "consciousness." Marx formulated his materialistic thesis in opposition to that preoccupation with consciousness as a point of departure which originated with Descartes. According to Marx, consciousness does not determine "being," but just the reverse; the material, i.e., the social, economic, and historical *being* of man determines his consciousness. For Marx:

> One can distinguish man from the other animals by means of consciousness, religion or whatever else one chooses. Men begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of life. In producing the means of life they indirectly produce their own material existence itself.

This mode of production is not just a reproduction of physical existence, but rather a definite kind of human activity, a historically determined way of life. Individuals are what they express about their lives through the active production of something. "What they are coincides with what and how they produce." The

moral, religious, political, and philosophical ideas which men consciously possess about themselves and their world are no original and independent foundation, no point of departure, but rather the ideological reflection of their actual activity in the real conditions of human existence. History does not begin with the so-called history of the spirit and of consciousness, but with the production of the most primitive means for the satisfaction of basic needs. This fundamental history is differentiated and extended through the increase and multiplication of our needs. Through the extension of various modes of production and trade, history becomes world-history which corresponds to a world-market. Marx distinguishes this socio-economic concept of world-history from the Hegelian notion of a "world-spirit" which, according to Marx, is only a fictitious subject.

The Communist Manifesto appeared two years after Marx had finished *The German Ideology,* his critical discussion of post-Hegelian philosophy. Like the earlier work, the *Manifesto* is based entirely upon a philosophical concept of history. Its major thesis is that the course of human history consists in a process of perpetual antagonism, in which the conflict between rulers and ruled, exploiters and exploited grows steadily and becomes so critical that it must finally be resolved through the clash of the capitalistic bourgeoisie and the propertyless proletariat. At the end of this conflict there is, for Marx, the ultimate historical expectation that communism will do away with the rule of man over man by abolishing private property. Communism "solves the riddle of history."

Marxist thought and its opponents seem to be worlds apart only so long as we overlook the profound unity between their exclusively historical points of view. Non-Marxist philosophy of history is helpless against Marxism because its thought is just as historical and ideological. It would also like to change the world which it has reduced to world-history—but not quite so radically and at less expense. A century after Marx, non-Marxist philosophy has also discovered that contemporary man is "alienated" and realizes, like Marx, that it stands between "a world that has grown old" and a new historical beginning. Like the young Marx, it is unhappy about the fact that the "old gods" are dead and a "new god" has not yet appeared. With Marx, but also with Nietzsche and Heidegger, it is convinced that man must become something other than he has been in the past and that the whole previous history and philosophy of Europe has reached its end. Thus, it no longer calls itself "philosophy" but the "thinking of being" or of

that "which is," namely now and in the future—but not of what always is! In its own way, it shares the "materialistic" thesis that consciousness does not determine being, but that being determines consciousness. It shares Marx's skepticism about a Hegelian "world-spirit" and agrees further with Marx that the path which led to Hegel cannot be followed, that instead there must be a "descent from the summit of metaphysics" and a denial of the absolute and the unconditional. Finally, the non-Marxist view is as godless as Marxism, although it is not as self-satisfied in its unbelief as the professed atheism of the nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, contemporary philosophy, despite its posthumous relationship with Marx, has no dogma, i.e., it has nothing to teach about history that could be used as an answer to the challenge of Marxism. The historical mode of thinking of quasi-Marxists, of converts from Marxism, and of anti-Marxists, lacks the absolute character of historical materialism. These contemporary opponents of Marx stand upon the tottering foundation of an epochal, historical consciousness, but their thought is relative and relativistic, while Marx and Marxism are convinced that they know "what is," what everything depends upon, and at what history is aiming.

Nor, since non-Marxist philosophy has no doctrine, can it indoctrinate the masses. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage. Considered historically, the lack of doctrine is an obvious disadvantage, but from a philosophical and human point of view, it is a modest advantage. That the absence of dogma, or, positively put, skepticism, is an advantage, can only be claimed, however, when there exists a readiness to question the dogmatic presuppositions of non-Marxist thought. Historicism is an example of a thoroughly dogmatic presupposition of contemporary thought, i.e., the belief in the absolute relevance of what is most relative: history. The capitalist and bourgeois world of the West, whose self-criticism is the doctrine of Marx, believes in neither a live cosmos nor a kingdom of God. It has faith only in the "spirit of the age," the *Zeitgeist,* "the wave of the future" or "historical destiny," understood either vulgarly or in a more sophisticated manner. Thus, there are hidden links between idealistic and materialistic historicism and contemporary historico-ontological [*seinsgeschichtlich*] thought which seems to be equally far removed from Marx and from Hegel.

Hegel, the contemporary of Napoleon, conceived his completion of the European history of the spirit to be the fulfillment of an undeveloped beginning that was two thousand years old; Hei-

degger, the contemporary of Hitler, regards the same history as the completed development of nihilism. Like all radical criticism of the nineteenth century, Heidegger's thought stands at the extreme outer limit of a tradition which has barely lasted until now and it calls into question everything which is fundamental to this tradition—even the logical principles of thinking itself. At the same time, Heidegger's thought moves exclusively within this very same tradition. Even the "fate of being" is limited to the early and late history of the West, as if the universal Being of all beings had some particular preference for the Occident.